The
Pagan
Library

None Dare Call It Reason:

Kids, Cults, and Common Sense

Robert Hicks

Law Enforcement Section Department of Criminal Justice Services 805 E. Broad Street Richmond, Virginia 232l9 804-786-8421

Talk prepared for the Virginia Department for Children's l2th Annual Legislative Forum, Roanoke, Virginia, September 22, 1989

In an article on satanic cults in Family Violence Bulletin published by the University of Texas at Tyler, Dr. Paula Lundberg-Love writes of a seminar she attended entitled "Ritualistic Child Abuse and Adolescent Indoctrination." Quoting the seminar instructor, who is president of the Cult Awareness Council in Houston, Lundberg-Love writes that "some satanic cults are created for the expressed purposes of child prostitution or the production of child pornography" and that "'religion' has proved to be a good 'front' for organized child prostitution and pornography rings." Perhaps more damning as a reflection on our collective impotence, she points out that "in many states, ritualistic behavior is not against the law" (l989: 9).

In recounting the amazing and startling facts she learned, Lundberg- Love offers the following insight about how satanists ply their trade:

> There are also individuals within the cult to whom particular tasks are assigned. Transporters are the people who take babies and ship them out-of-state. Spotters have the task of looking for recruits or objects. Breeders are, as their name implies, used for the purposes of breeding. The production of 'snuff' films (films in which an individual is actually killed) is associated with these persons. [The seminar instructor] suggested that juveniles may be being used to transport these films across the border. (Ibid.)

I can only admire Houston's Cult Awareness Council for their shrewd investigative work in uncovering the clandestine mechanics of a satanic international conspiracy so slick and sophisticated that its members remain faceless, having never been identified, and its murderous activities remain covert because the satanists leave no traces of their nefarious undertakings. Yet the Cult Awareness Council has produced a model of the cult's activities that is specific and detailed. But, of course, we have no evidence of satanic child prostitution, no evidence that women breed babies for sacrifice, no one has ever found a snuff film. But Lundberg- Love's article has credibility: the article's author is the associate director of the Family Violence Research and Treatment Program at the University of Texas, Tyler.

I suggest that Houston's Cult Awareness Council, intentionally or perhaps, worse, unwittingly, has become a conduit for a farrago of half- truths, unsupported generalizations, vague musings, hysteria, and downright ignorance fostered in part by Fundamentalist Christian groups with the willing collusion of police and the so-called helping professions. Lundberg-Love, by reiterating satanic nonsense to other professionals, has shown irresponsibility stirred by an inability to think critically. Or drop the "critically": an inability to think underlies claims about women who breed babies for satanic sacrifices, about children forced to witness human sacrifice in daycare centers, about teenagers transformed into zombies by playing Dungeons and Dragons.

More insidious from my point of view is her observation that satanic cults operate under the guise of religion and thus deserve First Amendment protection, therefore precluding legal retaliation against these evildoers. This observation begs the question of necessity. In times of stress, people seek to proscribe or criminalize behavior that they imagine threatens the larger public good. We must curtail civil liberties, for awhile, some say, because of an immediate necessity to do so. Threats of immanent harm from our enemies necessitate an abrogation of certain rights. Illicit drug use has reached such epidemic proportions that we must of necessity unlock closed doors in the Fourth Amendment to allow police to conduct intrusive searches otherwise prohibited by the Constitution. We must of necessity allow the government more power to protect us from outsiders. Satanism presents such a threat to us that we necessarily must ban certain forms of rock music to protect our children, remove books on witchcraft and the occult from school libraries, confiscate Dungeons and Dragons books on school property.

I maintain that although satanic or occult symbols seem to be enjoying popularity today among teens, their presence does not betoken a lost kid, one in satan's thrall. Historian Jeffrey Burton Russell has observed, "Rooted in adolescent resentment of authority, [kids use] the terms and symbols of the occult to express cultural rebellion rather than personal belief" (l986: 257). If today you came to hear lurid tales of children participating in pornographic movies produced by satan's film unit or of demons nabbing teenagers while playing Dungeons and Dragons and forced to kill their families, I'm going to disappoint you. Most of you not only work with children in the capacities of educators, therapists, law enforcers, but you also assume the role of advocates for children's welfare. I ask you not to relinquish any of those roles but I do ask that you not relinquish your critical faculties, as Lundberg-Love has done, whenever you hear the words "ritualisic," "satanic," "occult," or "cult."

Do not dissolve your gray matter and willingly adopt as immutable truths such ideas as: children never lie about sexual abuse; teenagers who are Girl or Boy Scouts, members of a church, or good students cannot do nasty things, or if they do, someone or something made them do it. Or that teens have so little free will that lurking satanists will deceive them into attending sex and drug parties and thereby swear them in as card- carrying minions of The Evil One. Or that teens have so little judgment where fantasy is concerned that we must absolutely control all that they read and hear.

In particular, question glib assertions made at cult awareness seminars. Analyze the cause-effect relationships foisted on you. Question cult experts' credentials. As for law enforcers, you will find that most police cult experts derive their expertise from attending other cult seminars. I recently spoke opposite a State Police officer who gave a slide program on satanism but admitted that he had never investigated a putative cult crime; his work, rather, involved accounting. You could have invited another speaker here today, one who purports that teens are in great danger of satanic or occult influence and that, in particular, Dungeons and Dragons damages kids' psyches. Patricia

A. Pulling, though, who heads Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons (BADD), has no clinical background, though parents frequently haul their misbehaving children before her for an analysis of their satanic proclivities. She recently represented herself at a Virginia cult seminar as being "a private investigator with the state of Virginia" and noted that she had received "innumerable degrees and awards." As far as I know, her innumerable degrees extend to an AA from J. Sargent Reynolds Community College, Richmond, but the private investigator business implies some association with state government. In truth, she holds a state license to be a private investigator, a pursuit requiring one week of classroom training. Period. But beyond what she says, the publisher of her recent book, The Devil's Web, refers to her as "a police detective." Such wishful thinking smacks of dishonesty.

Yet popular speakers like Pat Pulling assert that 95 to l50 kids have committed suicide related to playing Dungeons and Dragons. People at her seminars nod sagely and gasp in astonishment that our government allows such a game to exist. What is her proof of this assertion? In her booklet, Dungeons and Dragons, she offers a series of newspaper clippings to prove her point. In one, with no source cited, an Arlington, Texas, boy killed himself with a shotgun in front of his drama class. The first paragraph of the article notes that the boy "was a devotee of the fantasy game Dungeons and Dragons and had a lead role in this weekend's school play," an odd parallel comment, perhaps. An observation occurs further on in the article that the boy enjoyed the game. But where is the causal relationship? The article quotes the boys' friends as commenting on his character, but no one quoted even links the game to the death. Yet this article, for all its superficiality, counts as a statistical fatality (BADD n.d.). And no one challenges this assertion at Pulling's seminars.

In The Devil's Web, Pulling defines Dungeons and Dragons as a "fantasy role-playing game which uses demonology, witchcraft, voodoo, murder, rape, blasphemy, suicide, assassination, insanity, sex perversion, homosexuality, prostitution, satanic type rituals, . . .and many other teachings. There have been a number of deaths nationwide where [such games] were either the decisive factor in adolescent suicide and murder, or played a major factor. . .Since role-playing is used typically for behavior modification, it has become apparent nationwide . . .that there is a great need to investigate every aspect of a youngster's environment. . ." (l989: 179). Pulling further states that fantasy role-playing games "are representative of the many subtle ways in which occult influences can prey upon the minds of children" (Ibid.: l02). But the game retails in images and symbols: kids enact imaginary adventures through imaginary means, not by translating the action to their everyday environment.

Pulling's main scare about D&D is that the game contains some bona fide occult material, whatever that is. She seems to think that where game designers use demons and monsters from the writings of medieval and late l9th century English sources, that somehow the game takes on a pernicious magic of its own. Pulling is alarmed at the nature of the demons and monsters invoked by the game, but the monsters, often drawn from the encyclopedia or from game designers' imaginations, bear no evil beyond what people impute to them. If we bridle at D&D, then we must take offense at the Creature from the Black Lagoon, a multitude of plastic toys found at any shopping mall, comic books, Saturday morning TV, and the like. Demons, monsters, creatures from space populate kids' imaginations and one easily sees why: Star Trek, Star Wars, and like films ensure that space beings take on an omnipresent reality, coupled with "legitimate" science. Pulling also introduces a paradox and an insight: she claims that the students most susceptible to falling within the spiraling path to hell are bright boys with varied interests who may lack social skills. In other words, nerds. The insight in all this focuses on the kids' interests. A recent anthropological study of modern witches and magic in Britain observed that many male adherents of magic groups had computer backgrounds, an observation made by many people about D&D players (Luhrman l989: l06). Anthropologist T. M. Luhrmann observes that these folks also read science fiction in abundance. She speculates on why these people gravitate to magic:

> [S]everal possible explanations present themselves. Perhaps the most important is that both magic and computer science involve creating a world defined by chosen rules, and playing within their limits. Both in magic and in computer science words and symbols have a power which most secular, modern endeavours deny them. Those drawn to the symbol-rich rule-governed world of computer science may be attracted by magic. . .One reason that the fantasy games designed for the computer may be so appealing may be because of the complexity of the rules. Another explanation is the sense of mastery and power when the machine obeys your dictates, which may feel like the mastery of magic. . .The wizard commands the material world, breaking the laws which seem to bind it. (Ibid.: l07).

Massachusetts Institute of Technology sociologist S. Turkle has written at length about young men's involvement with computers and D&D. I refer you to The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit, by S. Turkle, l984, published by the MIT Press.

So Pulling scares parents by isolating from context specific rules concerning particular demons, overlooking the game's intellectual challenge: after all, since the game involves no board, players must rely on imagery and imagination. If one removes the aura of a supernatural netherworld from the game, and if one questions the shoddy evidence for the game's links to teen murder and suicide, what is one left with? Just a game. I make no apologies for ruining anyone's scapegoat for the world's ills, if you do find the game scary. Quite possibly some people find the game a mental accessory to a criminal propensity: but question closely any convicted murderer who claims that D&D made him do it. Sociopaths need no such justification, but when confined to prison cells contemplating a bleak future, why not blame one's behavior on a game?

But back to Pulling's model of the D&D player. Those kids who are intelligent with poor social skills simply defines the process of growing up. By imbuing games with some supernatural taint, we deny kids their own intelligence and ability to make choices. When the Pasadena, Texas, school board decided to ban the l960's peace symbol from school property, they did so because a cult seminar advised teachers that the symbol is satanic: that interpretation derives from Christian publications that describe the upside-down cross as a mockery of Christianity. How do the kids react? One twelve-year-old said, "If they ban peace symbols, they'll have to ban basic geometry because of all its lines and circles" (Time, July 3, l989). These kids ain't fools: they usually separate faddish symbols from serious evildoing. But if they know that the symbol offends some adults, what do you suppose they'll do? A counselor at the Bon Air detention facility in Richmond told me that rooms for kids come equipped with a Bible. One teenager took one look at the Bible and challenged the counselor: he demanded The Satanic Bible, the one published by Anton LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan, in l969. Now, the counselor has been challenged: who might win this little power struggle? If the counselor leaps back, makes the sign of a cross, and in an hysterical voice cries out, "Get thee behind me, Satan," guess who wins? In this case, the counselor blandly replied, "Sure. I'll see what I can do. Tell me where I can find a copy." For those of you who are worried about that response, I can only attribute your worry to not having read The Satanic Bible. Read it and you'll agree with religious scholar Gordon Melton who has referred to it as "assertiveness training with a twist." The book does not even praise a supernatural devil and instead relies on Satan's symbolic history in our culture. Further, unlike parts of the Christian Bible, The Satanic Bible very explicitly warns readers not to physically harm children nor anyone else.

I noted the influence of Fundamentalist Christianity on not only the D&D ideology but on other aspects of the satanic cult bruhaha. Much of what Pulling and cult cops and other self-proclaimed experts parley to audiences comes from Christian sources. For example, the earliest denigration of D&D I could come up with, from l980, says this:

> Some endeavors offer a greater temptation for ego to manifest itself in us, however. The next thing to actual defeat of others and self-exaltation as rulers over the vanquished is the voluntary, imaginary role- playing that is offered by such games as Dungeons and Dragons. . .It is not without knowledge that Dungeons and Dragons was devised. But it is the knowledge of an evil that mingled the Babylonian mystery religions with a luke-warm 'Christianity.' (Dager l980)

The same thoughts have been conveyed to cult awareness audiences again and again and again. I asked you earlier to sift such information, question it, analyze it, and ask the credentials of these experts. Among the books prominently displayed at cult seminars are two by Rebecca Brown, MD, He Came to Set the Captives Free and Prepare for War. Ken Lanning, FBI special agent who specializes in child sexual abuse investigations, raises the issue of cult seminars not defining terms, using the "words satanic, occult, and ritualistic" interchangeably (l989:4). Lanning particularly cites Brown's contributions to this confusion as her "doorways" to demonic infestation (to use Lanning's term) include horoscopes, vegetarianism, yoga, biofeedback, homosexuality, fraternity oaths, along with the standard fantasy role-playing games, Church of Satan, the Hare Krishna movement, and so on. So who is Rebecca Brown and why does she wield authority? Her title gets attention: she has appeared at seminars and on television, no less. What's her background?

In l984, she was known as Ruth Bailey, MD, and she practiced medicine in Indiana. That year, she lost her license. Medical examiners concluded that she knowingly misdiagnosed such ailments as leukemia, various blood diseases, and even brain tumors in patients who were not in fact suffering from these problems. Bailey said that she had been "chosen by God" as the only physician who could diagnose such maladies which were caused by demons. And, further, other doctors could not diagnose these problems because the doctors themselves were demons. As a result of these diagnoses, she prescribed her patients with massive doses of Demerol and the addicted patients had to undergo detoxification. Besides administering drugs to patients, Bailey had another novel method up her sleeve: she would "share" the patient's disease by injecting herself with "non- therapeutic amounts" of Demerol, taking three cubic centimeters of the stuff hourly, injecting it in the back of her hands or inside her thighs. The psychiatrist who examined her said that she suffered from "acute personality disorders including demonic delusions and/or paranoid schizophrenia" (Medical Licensing Board of Indiana l984). She later moved to California, changing her name to Rebecca Brown through a change-of-name petition entered into the Superior Court, County of San Bernardino, in l986. There are a few lessons here. Be careful not to accept facile explanations of misbehavior at face value. Don't uncritically accept a source because it has a Christian message.

By refusing to define "satanism," "occult," and "ritualistic," cult experts can unleash these words to fit any social dilemma, misbehavior, or human failing they wish. And they do. The lack of definition aids and abets the conspiracy theory fanned by Pulling and the cult cops. These cult cops take as evidence of a conspiracy the presence of like symbols across the country. They further surmise that the presence of a spray- painted inverted pentagram underside a bridge in San Francisco not only means the same thing as one on a bridge in Norfolk but that some satanic supramind, the international conspiracy has organized people to wreak havoc on us all. This conspiracy, of course, supposedly recruits children, teens especially. Pulling and the cult cops would have us suspend heaps of disbelief to accept that the D&D player who peers into the occult through game playing gets yanked by some mind-control cult into an abrupt personality change characterized by violence and hate. No one wants to consider other, more mundane explanations for personality changes and mood swings, apparently. But in the face of a complete absence of evidence for a conspiracy, some cult cops can find only feeble argument.

Take Idaho police officer Larry Jones, who authors the Cult Crime Impact Network newsletter, a Fundamentalist-biased periodical widely read by cult cops. In defense of the lack of evidence, Jones tosses the question back: "'To people who say, prove to me these secret cults exist, I say, prove they don't'" (Springston l989). To this inanity, I find the reply easy: since my orientation to the cult scare concerns law enforcement, a perspective Jones should share, I say that police officers have no obligation to prove that the satanic mastercult doesn't exist. Police officers operate under well-founded reasonable suspicion to look into suspected wrongdoing, and they make arrests based on probable cause. Both reasonable suspicion and probable cause have fairly precise definitions supported by reams of case law. I can't prove that UFO's exist, but just prove to me that they don't. I can't prove that termites built the Great Pyramid, but just prove to me that they didn't. When Richmond Bureau of Police Lieutenant Lawrence Haake was asked whether he had any evidence of satanic sacrifices of people, he admitted he didn't but added, "'No evidence can be evidence'" (Ibid.) Sure, perhaps, but no evidence can also mean that none exists. Many cult cops have indeed asserted that the lack of any evidence testifies to the satanic cult's success at covering their tracks. Well, if you're backed into a corner, try tossing skepticism back into the lap of the skeptic. Pulling maintains that many unsolved homicides might be sacrificial victims and says, "'They certainly have found a number of unsolved murders with no motive, haven't they?'" (Ibid.) Some have gone unsolved, yes, but one cannot logically conclude that satanists did them. But I almost forgot: these shifty satanists, says Pulling, include the intelligentsia and power brokers of our society, so we might as well cave in than resist (Briggs l988). Better devil red than dead.

Which brings us back to definitions for a moment. A satanic ritualistic killing, to the cult cops, ought to be defined as a killing performed in propitiation of satan. We certainly have plenty of killers around who claim a satanic motivation, but killers simply adopt an ideology that justifies or explains what they would do in any case. The argument that a true satanic killing would therefore implicate those mild, middle- class, suburban engineers and doctors and lawyers simply vanishes upon scrutiny: such folks haven't yet been arrested for these sacrifices. So much for satanic crime. On to "occult." As Lanning points out, "Occult means simply 'hidden,'" a term unconnected with crime, but used by cult cops to refer "to the action or influence of supernatural powers. . .or an interest in paranormal phenomena" (l989:5). But Lanning rails against the use of "ritualistic," since folks who point fingers and yell "ritualistic!" forget that ritual governs our lives in benign fashion. Again, Lanning: "During law enforcement training conferences on this topic, ritualistic almost always comes to mean satanic or at least spiritual. Ritual can refer to a prescribed religious ceremony, but in its broader meaning refers to any customarily repeated act or series of acts. The need to repeat these acts can be cultural, sexual, or psychological as well as spiritual" (Ibid.: 7). He concludes: "The most important point for the criminal investigator is to realize that most ritualistic criminal behavior is not motivated simply by satanic or religious ceremonies" (Ibid. 9). I refer you to Lanning for an extended discussion of the word.

We've attached some meaning to "ritual," "occult," and "satanic crime," so we're left with "cult." Definitions of the word depend on the scholarly purposes they serve. But I have not been so concerned with the academic treatment of the word, but rather its current connotation in cult awareness seminars. I agree with Gordon Melton that "[t]he term 'cult' is a pejorative label used to describe certain religious groups outside of the mainstream of Western religion" (l986:3) The pejorative quality of the label is borne out by the attributes heaped on cults by cult experts: that cult members must swear obedience to the all-powerful leader, that cults pursue ends that justify the means, that cults retain members through mind control methods. This language has been pretty consistently applied to nonconformists for a few centuries now. Rather, I agree with Melton that "Cults represent a force of religious innovation within a culture" (Ibid.), but Melton's social science approach to categorizing and studying cults doesn't mesh with the cult seminar use of the term. In a very broad sense, cults don't even have to be religious. Cult cops assume that two or more kids who hang out together and wear upside down crosses, pentagrams, and Ozzy Osborne buttons might be cult members. This kind of cult in former days we called a clique. Now, we are to assume that such kids have gotten sucked into a black hole of mind control, manipulation by satanic recruiters, all unwarranted assumptions. But some cults we know to promote violence. Let me name a few: The Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord; The Christian

Conservative Church of America; The Church of Christ of Christian Aryan Nations (all described in Melton l986). Sorry, though: I couldn't come up with any satanic groups which promote the militarism of these Christian organizations.

More directly, when we allow cult seminar presenters to rant away without defining their terms or by being explicit about what they know and don't know, we play a dangerous game. Gordon Melton observes that when people speak of "them" as satanic, or as an enemy, or as a criminal cult, we thereby "express [our] contempt of others and . . .assign them a status outside the realm of God's chosen, and hence of lesser worth, [which] is the religious equivalent of secular terms such as 'nigger,' 'kike,' or 'wop'" (Ibid. 259). When the Matamoros murders hit the headlines, the newspapers dubbed them "satanic," a term that disappeared within a week as it became obvious to investigators that the murders had nothing to do with satanic cults. But the labels that stuck involved foreign experiences such as Palo Mayombe and Santeria, words most Americans heard for the first time. But to dub the killings as Santeria or Palo Mayombe, drawn as perverse cults by the press, amounts to impure and simple racism. What I cannot understand is the Fundamentalist Christian diatribe against nonChristian beliefs that have been tagged as cultic. As I have pointed out, cult cops freely label groups as cults and therefore imply a threat to one's free will. But as the historian Jeffrey Burton Russell has pointed out, such people "claim that a belief in the Devil erodes human responsibility, but Christianity has always insisted that the Devil has no power to coerce or compel the human will" (l986: 300).

I hope I have forced your attention to the importance of developing solid definitions for social problems. Precise definition provides the best map through which to explore the phenomena of children's behavior. But, of course, you know this. Simply don't forget it when cults enter the fray. Imprecision and casual name-calling by cult awareness seminars has led to severe consequences for both children and adult child advocates. I would like to cite one example, one, unfortunately, which I stress is not unique. But my example illustrates how the helping professions may ignore suggestions of actual physical or mental abuse and instead pursue claims of satanic goings on in daycare centers and in the process the counselors, therapists, and police end up abusing children.

Since l983, the country witnessed the first of many cases of purported satanic abuse of children in daycare centers, beginning with the McMartin case in California, followed quickly by the Jordan, Minnesota case, and they continue to happen. The best and most critical examination of such cases appeared in a series of investigative reports published in a Memphis newspaper, The Commercial Appeal, last year. Journalists Tom Charlier and Shirley Downing found that these cases were "not really about ritual child abuse at all. [They] are about the dangers of popular justice, a less- than-skeptical press and the presumption of guilt" (l988). Over a hundred cities have witnessed the same pattern: a single incident of alleged abuse by a single child mushroomed into mass accusations of parents, daycare center workers, and even prosecutors and police. The children's stories which launched the cases were usually uncorroborated by physical evidence or even adult testimony. Further, the nature of the prosecutory system itself fanned the flames of accusation. By the time such cases entered court, the news media greedily reported children's stories of devil worship, nude dancing with daycare staff, varieties of sexual assault, human and animal sacrifice, nude photography, bondage, drowning, cooking and eating babies' limbs, and so on. And the investigators, who pursued evidence of crime, acted as advocates by removing kids from their homes before their parents had even been investigated, much less charged with crimes.

Unfortunately, these stories reveal that prosecutors, allied with parents, adopted as an unqualified truth the assertion that children don't lie about abuse. Yet investigators asked children leading questions, interviewed them as many as 50 times in some cases, refused to accept kids' denials that satanic abuse took place, offered rewards or exerted pressure to obtain correct testimony from them. One case, in Bakersfield, California a few years ago, produced prison terms totalling 26l9 years for seven defendants, which set a record (Mathews l989).

The Bakersfield case began in l984 when a girl reported to her mother that two men had "touched" her in a peculiar way. Within a year's time, the one allegation evolved into a sex abuse ring, satanic rituals, and infanticide (what follows derives from a report of the Office of the Attorney General, California, l986). Twenty-one children had been

placed in protective custody away from their homes. How did this happen?

Once removed from their homes, the children endured repeated questioning by police, therapists, and welfare workers. Further, the sheriff's department interviewed children in isolation while in protective custody. Parents were arbitrarily arrested and released with no charges filed. The deputies, most of whom had virtually no training in child abuse matters (and had not even attended mandatory California inservice training in the subject, although they found time to attend a satanic cult seminar), simply deferred their questioning of children to a child protective services worker, described as zealous for her unqualified belief that the children maintained the truth under questioning. Yet the questioning occurred repeatedly, even after the sheriff's deputies discussed the case before church groups and evolved their own beliefs about what was occurring. The deputies received virtually no supervision and no one coordinated the efforts of the three agencies trying to investigate the case. In all, l9 victims were interviewed l34 times. Searches yielded no evidence of sexual abuse or satanic crime, yet the deputies did not follow cues which required physical evidence gathering. For example, many kids claimed to have been drugged during cult rituals, yet no one tested them for drugs. Efforts to obtain any corroborative physical evidence were feeble or nonexistent. Further, deputies did not even furnish verbatim interviews with the children, instead simply paraphrasing the interviews and offering in the transcripts unsupported conclusions.

Once in custody, kids mingled and had many opportunities to "cross germinate" their stories. Very significantly, the child witnesses first denied that their parents were involved in the satanic molestations, but after repeated questioning under the direction of the zealous therapist, children not only implicated their parents but also many investigators in the case. The sheriff's deputies and the social worker conducted their inquisition based on the premise that "children do not lie." This meant that investigators took children's statements at face value and neglected to do further corroborative work. The following interview took place between a suspected parent-abuser and the social worker:

Social worker: Okay, ah. . .you know when children, when children tell law enforcement or Child Protective Services. . .
Suspect: Uh huh.
SW: About somebody we believe children, okay.
S: Uh huh.
SW: Especially little, ah, would involve children but these are just, you know, four, four, five and six-year olds. . .
S: Uh huh.
SW: Okay, and they don't have, they shouldn't have knowledge of this stuff, they have a lot of knowledge, a lot of explicit details, knowledge, they say cream was being used. . .lotion.
S: Have you seen, you know, TV nowadays though, the parents let their kids watch.
SW: Okay, people often do accuse TV, but still children don't fantasize about sexual abuse and they don't implicate their own father.
S: Uh huh.
SW: Okay?
S: Uh huh.
Deputy: Let alone themselves.
SW: Yeah, let alone themselves, especially when they're, when they are feeling so badly about and they know it's wrong.
S: Uh huh.
SW: Okay, it's just they, some you know, if they aren't gonna, if they're mad at their dad and that's when they may say physical abuse.
S: Uh huh.
SW: But, ah, they're not gonna say sexual.
S: Uh huh.
SW: It just doesn't happen.
S: Uh huh.
SW: So we, we do believe the children.
S: Uh huh.
SW: Okay, that you are involved.
S: Then no matter what I, what I say doesn't even matter then?
SW: Well, yeah of course it matters, but, but our stand is that we believe the children.
S: Uh huh.
SW: At all cost, cause that's our job and that's, that's what our belief is.

Quoting further from the California Attorney General's report of the matter, "This dependence upon and deferment to staff of Child Protective Services--who perform functions quite different from police officers in a child abuse investigation--focused the interviews primarily on protecting the child at the expense of investigating and

determining the facts in the case. While protecting the child was certainly critical, once that had been assured the criminal investigation should have been the Sheriff's deputies' primary concern."

Let's talk about the interviews with children for a moment. The California Attorney general found that deputies departed from standard interview practice and virtually ignored the complexities that obtain when the person interviewed is a child. "Deputies generally did not question the children's statements, and they responded positively or said something to reinforce their previous allegations. . . They applied pressure on the children to name additional suspects and victims, and questioned them with inappropriate suggestions that produced the answers they were looking for." Interviewers, both police and social workers, used leading and suggestive questions, gave quite overt positive reinforcement when they received answers they sought, rather than giving neutral responses. In some cases, interviewers demanded answers; sometimes they threatened the children; in other cases they confused them. A sample:

Interviewer: Okay, you said that they touched the privates before they stabbed the baby? Did they take the clothes off the baby before they stabbed the baby? Did they take the clothes off the baby when they touched the privates? And then they had you go up and stab the baby? So, did the baby--was the baby's clothes still off after they'd taken them off and you had to stab the baby?

Answer: No.

And in a flagrant abuse of investigative technique, a deputy had wanted to use an anatomically-detailed doll in an interview, but although deputies had them on hand, they had no training in their use. So one deputy told a child, "I forgot my dolly then you could point. You want to point on me?"

Let me point out that deputies did pursue the satanic claims, but found alleged homicide victims alive; they searched lakes where bodies supposedly were deposited and found none; in fact, they uncovered no evidence to prove any satanic assertions. The satanic connection, by the way, didn't even emerge in the case until after nine months of interviews with the kids. One psychiatrist in another daycare center case observed of the repeated interviews, "If [the investigator] get[s] a child to the point where they believe they've helped kill a baby or eaten flesh, I want to know whether you're a child abuser" (Charlier and Downing l988).

As two Pennsylvania State University criminal justice professors have pointed out, "If children denied victimization, then it was assumed they were concealing the truth, which must be drawn out by some inducement or reinforcement. The therapeutic process thus became an infallible generating mechanism for criminal charges," a remark made about the McMartin case that applies to Bakersfield also. (Jenkins and Katkin l988: 30). Psychiatrist Lee Coleman, who with journalist Debbie Nathan is writing a book about the daycare cases, adds that

> The interviewers assume, before talking with the child, that molestation has taken place. The accused persons are assumed to be guilty, and the thinly disguised purpose of the interview is to get something out of the child to confirm these suspicions. It is all too easy, with repeated and leading and suggestive questions, to get a young child so confused that he or she can't tell the difference between fact and fantasy. (l986: 8).

There are three great tragedies in all this: one, that real physical or sexual abuse of a child will pass uninvestigated; two, that children are abused by the criminal justice process, children who are victims of nothing except not telling stories that investigators want to hear; third, that innocent adults will have their lives ruined. One young imprisoned mother in the Bakersfield case, whose children have been placed in foster care, looks forward to freedom one day, but she does not want to be united with her kids. She says, "'I'm scared of kids. I'm scared to death of kids. . . I'm glad I can't have any more" (Mathews l989).

One might place the burden of blame for a shoddy investigation on the sheriffs' deputies, since the law enforcers were charged with detecting lawbreaking and arresting offenders. And, of course, seven women still languish in prison. But what of therapists, psychiatrists, and psychologists? Although the satanic nature of the daycare allegaions has only recently begun to appear in professional literature, purportedly scholarly studies have taken the satanic abuse claims quite uncritically. The uncritical treatment of the subject is bound to influence other professionals more prone to be convinced by tables of data with chi-square tests than to question the data in the tables.

For example, Susan J. Kelly, R.N., Ph.D, Boston School of Nursing, even elaborated a typology of ritual abuse (building on the work of family violence expert David Finkelhor, of whom more in a moment) and discussed satanic philosophy by noting its "fundamental tenet that followers have a right to abundant and guilt-free sex of every description. Moreover, because Christianity believes that children are special to God, satanism, which negates Christianity, considers the desecration of children to be a way of gaining victory over God" (l988: 229). This description of satanic ideology amounts to pure dogma, perpetuated and elaborated by the cult awareness seminars and the press. Like other therapists, Kelly imputes the the cult presence surrounding child abuse to the usual mind control methods employed against members and so on. No one, apparently, wants to consider the proposition that some child abusers, who may go to elaborate and imaginative lengths to intimidate children into not revealing the abuse, may employ satanic trappings to do just that. Therapists such as Kelly have also ignored the inquisitorial process that produces arrests and convictions, as in the Bakersfield case, preferring not to confront the issue of leading children to contrive satanic scenarios to please eager investigators.

I find that David Finkelhor's latest book, Nursery Crimes: Sexual Abuse in Daycare, not only perpetuates the satanic dogma but using mathematical analyses of bad data, it emerges with a new class of offender. The study examined cases in 270 daycare centers, but the cases had to be "substantiated" before inclusion in the data. In order to be substantiated, the study team had to find only one professional agency associated with a case who believed that abuse occurred. And this study swept up all of the much-publicized daycare center abuse cases such as McMartin and even Bakersfield. So the study takes as a working assumption that the allegations in the satanic ritual abuse cases are true. While the study makes insightful remarks about child abuse and attempts a comprehensive look at abuse, the victims, and the abusers, the inclusion of the satanic cases renders the study yet more dogma masquerading as science. I said that the skewed data created a new class of offenders. Every study of child sexual abuse portrays offenders as almost exclusively men, usually acting alone. The rare cases involving women usually find them complicit as the consequence of involvement with a man: a boyfriend or husband, for example. Yet the satanic ritual cases involving daycare centers have almost entirely focused on the women running the centers. And the allegations hold that women, entire daycare center staffs, ran satanic parties replete with mass sex abuse, child pornography, and the like. I should hope that the Bakersfield case suggests to you that other dynamics, to use the social work term, govern the sensationalistic cases. Nonetheless, Finkelhor and his colleagues pronounce that "Female perpetrators were significantly more likely than men to have forced children to sexually abuse others and to have participated in ritualistic, mass abuse" (l988: 45).

In rather limp fashion, Finkelhor notes that the satanic allegations have emerged in some daycare cases months after abuse investigations have begun under some other pretext. Unlike some investigators who find the delay evidence that children have been coached to tell such stories, he holds that children may need months of therapy before finding the strength to tell the satanic tales. But Finkelhor's conclusions present a mixed bag. On the one hand, he singles out the marauding women, "We recommend that parents, licensing, and law-enforcement officials be educated to view females as potential sexual abusers" (Ibid.: 257) Yet he advises that we "avoid a disproportionate focus on day-care abuse" because abuse in the daycare setting amounts to a relatively small percentage of abuse overall.

The idea of pervasive satanic cults which influence and intimidate children should not supplant a reasonable, cautious inquiry, for law enforcers and therapists alike. Ironically, despite the cult seminars which contrive images of the faceless, tenebrous evil that grips us from the bowels of hell, the tentacles of demons wrapped around kids'

necks, the cult experts who teach the seminars often conclude with common-sense advice. For example, Woman's Day magazine printed "A Parent's Primer on Satanism" recently (l988). The primer noted that bright, bored, underachieving, talented and even gifted teens are susceptible to cults. Watch for kids exhibiting personality changes or mood swings; kids who drop friends and favorite activities in exchange for other activities and friends; who keep secrets, particularly about new friends; receive erratic grades; misbehave; wear satanic symbols on jewelry, T-shirts, and the like. Now, if one removes the cult from all of this, one is left with teens growing up, dealing with social pressures, handling puberty, running at full tilt on massive doses of pizza and hormones. But what's a parent to do? Woman's Day suggests not to panic; observe the child; if the teen listens to rock music with offensive lyrics, listen to what the child listens to. "If [the lyrics] disturb you, talk to him or her about it. Ask what the words mean to your child" (Ibid.). No matter what ill we believe threatens our children--whether communists, satanists, The Beatles or Twisted Sister--the advice is the same: don't panic; observe; listen; talk. Don't ignore satanic symbols or paraphernalia, but don't imbue them with cosmic significance, either. Rely on your professional experience and training to guide your rational inquiry about satan in teens' lives. Don't panic, and trust children, teens particularly, to behave responsibly most of the time, and don't leap to satanic excuses to explain misbehavior.

Thank you.

Addendum: Investigation of Child Sexual Abuse Resources

Cult seminars sometimes suggest that women breed babies for sacrifice, that runaway or throwaway kids become sacrificial fodder.

- For a perspective on missing kids, consult "First Comprehensive Study of Missing Children in Progress," OJJDP Update on Research, April, l988.
- A related study is "Stranger Abduction Homicides of Children, OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, January, l989.
- Suggestions on new professional thinking for handling child sexual abuse cases can be found in "Prosecuting child sexual abuse--new approaches," by Debra Witcomb, Research in Action, National Institute of Justice, May l986 (reprinted from NIJ Reports/SNI l97.
- A related article, "Prosecution of Child Sexual Abuse: Innovations in Practice," appeared in the NIJ Research in Brief, November, l985, also by Debra Witcomb.
- Perhaps the best overall investigative guide is the l987 manual, Investigation and Prosecution of Child Abuse published by the National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse.
- Some discussion of the problems associated with anatomically-detailed dolls in child abuse investigations can be found in "Using dolls to interview child victims: Legal concerns and interview procedures," NIJ Research in Action, by Kenneth R. Freeman and Terry Estrada-Mullaney, reprinted from NIJ Reports/SNI 207, January/February l988.
- A review of the dolls' legal issues can be found in "'Real' Dolls Too Suggestive," by Debra Cassens Moss, American Bar Association Journal, December l, l988. The ABA Journal also carried another article by Moss in its May l, l987 issue, "Are the Children Lying?" which discussed the sensationalist daycare center cases.

References Cited

- Antiwar or Antichrist? Time, July 3, l989.
- B.A.D.D., Dungeons and Dragons, no date, Richmond, VA.
- Briggs, E. Satanic cults said to entice teens with sex, drugs. Richmond Times Dispatch, March 5, l988.
- Charlier, Tom, and Downing. Shirley. Justice Abused: A l980s Witch-Hunt. The Commercial Appeal, January, l988, Memphis. (six- part series)
- Coleman, Lee. Therapists are the real culprits in many child sexual abuse cases. Augustus, l4 (6): 7-9, l986.

- Dager, Albert J. A Media Spotlight Special Report: Dungeons and Dragons. l980. Santa Ana, California.
- Finkelhor, David; Williams, Linda M., Burns, Nanci. Nursery Crimes: Sexual Abuse in Day Care. l988. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Jenkins, Philip, and Katkin, Daniel. Protecting Victims of Child Sexual Abuse: A Case for Caution. The Prison Journal, Fall/Winter l988: 25-35.
- Kelley, Susan J. Ritualistic Abuse of Children: Dynamics and Impact. Cultic Studies Journal 5(2): 228-236, l988.
- Lanning, Kenneth V. Satanic, Occult, Ritualistic Crime: A Law Enforcement Perspective. Unpublished ms., l989. FBI Academy.
- Luhrmann, T. M. Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England. l989. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Lundberg-Love, P. Update on Cults Part I: Satanic Cults. Family Violence Bulletin 5(2): 9-l0, l989.
- Mathews, Jay. In California, a Question of Abuse. The Washington Post, May 3l, l989.
- Medical Licensing Board of Indiana. Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Order, Cause #83MLD038 in the Matter of Ruth Bailey, MD. Filed October 2, l984.
- Melton, J. G. Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America. l986. New York: Garland Publishing Company.
- Office of the Attorney General. Report on the Kern County Child Abuse Investigation. Sacramento, l986.
- Pulling, Patricia A. The Devil's Web. l989. Lafayette, LA: Huntington House, Inc.
- Russell, Jeffrey Burton. Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World. l986. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Springston, Rex. Experts say tales are bunk. (Two-part article). The Richmond News Leader, April 6-7, l989.
- A Parent's Primer on Satanism. Woman's Day, November 22, l988.

Fast Forward
2019-05-28 (/articles2/article.php?article_id=29)
Kindly Pagans, White Supremacists Hold Dueling Gatherings In Southern State Park

Keep the Faith
2019-05-27 (/articles2/article.php?article_id=27)
Young black women are leaving Christianity and embracing African witchcraft

CBN News
2019-05-27 (/articles2/article.php?article_id=25)
Atlanta Church Hires Psychic Medium to Minister to Congregation

The Week
2019-05-25 (/articles2/article.php?article_id=23)
The princess of Norway and her shaman lover

Religion News Service
2019-05-24 (/articles2/article.php?article_id=21)
Getting in on - and tossed out of - the Satanist Temple joke - Religion News Service

More Articles (/articles2/)

Search

Quote of the moment:

And on the eighth day Man created God.

This site has received hits since Aug 4, 2000

COPYLEFT:
The entire content of all public pages in The Pagan Library (graphics, text and HTML) are free information, released under the terms of the GPL. All copyrighted items mentioned are the property of their respective owners, and no form of ownership or endorsement is implied.

Last modified: August 19 2018 15:00:18